DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 854 HE 029 780

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TITLE Service-Learning and the Sociological Imagination: Approach and Assessment.
PUB DATE Oct 96
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Faculty Development Symposium (Memphis, TN, October 10-13, 1996). For a related document, see HE 029 779.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Colleges; College Role; *Community Services; Curriculum Development; Educational Attitudes; Educational Policy; Experiential Learning; Grading; Higher Education; Program Descriptions; *School Community Relationship; *Service Learning; *Sociology; *Student Participation; Student Responsibility
IDENTIFIERS *Rust College MS

ABSTRACT

Undergraduate sociology students at Rust College, Mississippi, an historically black college, have been given the opportunity to connect with the lives of others in institutional settings, thus making a generational connection between the college and a local nursing home. During the 1995-96 academic year, students in three sociology courses participated in service-learning activities. Students could elect a traditional course program or a program that included a structured service-learning component. The service-learning package was designed to constitute 30 percent of the student's final grade and were a formal part of the curriculum. Some of the students electing the service-learning component presented a qualitative assessment of their learning. Overall, the students in service-learning (N=26) did better than their peers who selected the standard option of instruction and grading. The resulting volunteer work experience can be listed on the student's resumes and this experience can also be used as a source of references for future employment. The experience is also likely to enhance the student's imagination and capacity to think sociologically, both important for success at the graduate level of study. Exhibits include a course description and evaluation instrument, description of the service-learning experience, required student journal entry form, student reflection paper outline, and final evaluation report form. (JLS)

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SERVICE-LEARNING AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION: APPROACH AND ASSESSMENT

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SERVICE-LEARNING AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION: APPROACH AND ASSESSMENT

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The American Sociology Association's (ASA) teaching literature in sociology is replete with two substantive matters that I hope to address using an optional, service-learning mode of instruction. First, the umbrella concept of the sociological imagination illuminates the discipline of sociology, but the notion is difficult to grasp with a traditional lecture style of instruction (Eckstein, Schoenike, and Delaney 1995; O'Flaherty 1992). Second, the involvement of sociology students in the local community is likely to enhance a student's understanding of sociological concepts, and the impact of structure on people's lives (Calderon and Farrell 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff 1994; Pestello et al. 1996). A central goal in undergraduate instruction is to get students to think like a sociologist; a necessary ability for success in graduate school and an asset for all forms of public service.

Students were given the opportunity to connect with people's lives in institutional settings that exist at both ends of the life course, the school and the nursing home. They assessed sociological concepts and theoretical models in the context of these settings. Students were given an opportunity to contemplate sociology's promise, that is sociology's capacity to enrich our understanding of the intersection between biography and history (Mills 1959).

During the 1995-1996 academic year I experimented with service-learning in one small sociology class during the fall semester, and two large sociology classes during the spring semester. Students in Sociological Theory and Introduction to Sociology volunteered at a day care center, and the Holly Springs intermediate school. Students in Sociology of Aging assisted at a local nursing home. I used a tight format for instruction and evaluation in all courses; a student's involvement in service learning did not replace the academic content of courses. The total service-learning package (participation, journal entries, class presentation, final paper) constituted 30% of a student's final grade (see below).

According to my figures from last year, 26 students successfully participated in service-learning. Two students in a class of 12 pursued the option in Sociological Theory. Both were the only students to receive a "B," and only one student received an "A" in the class. Forty students enrolled in Introduction to Sociology. Fourteen completed the service-learning option. Half of

these students received an "A"; five received a "B"; and two received a "C." Twenty six students earned grades using the traditional format for instruction. Five students earned an "A," five earned a "B," and five earned a "C." Thirty two students enrolled in Sociology of Aging. Ten completed the service-learning option. Evaluation results from service-learning show: three students earning an "A," three receiving a "B," and four acquiring a "C." Twenty-two students took the classroom route for securing grades. Two students earned an "A," four received a "B," and six received a "C." Tentatively, I conclude that service-learning is a viable alternative to a standard grading option. Overall, students in service-learning did better than their peers selecting the standard option for instruction.

In addition, a number of students presented a qualitative assessment of their learning. Students in both settings indicated the experience expanded their sociological imagination, that is understanding the intersection between individual biography and social structure. For example, at least one student commented that the experience enhanced an understanding of what its like to grow old in America, a process experienced by all; and at least one student sensed the instructional gap between teachers and students in the structural setting of the public school.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that a structured service-learning approach to sociological instruction is a wise investment. For one thing, volunteer work can be used on a student's resume. The experience can be listed, and a personal reference can be obtained for future employment. For another, the experience is likely to enhance a student's sociological imagination. Evidence indicates that developing a student's capacity to think sociologically is essential for success in graduate school. For example, in a selection of undergraduate catalogs only three courses are repeatedly identified as required sociology courses for the major: Introduction to Sociology, Social Problems, and Sociological Theory. It seems reasonable to suppose that the knowledge sociology majors bring with them to graduate school is quite diverse. Hence, it may be most important to get our majors to think sociologically, because our alumni will be exposed to many, new materials like students throughout the world entering graduate programs in sociology.

References

Calderon, Jose and Betty Farrell. 1996. "Doing Sociology: Connecting the Classroom Experience with a Multiethnic School District." *Teaching Sociology* 24:46-53.

Eckstein, Rick, Rebecca Schoenike, and Kevin Delaney. 1995. "The Voice of Sociology: Obstacles to Teaching and Learning the Sociological Imagination." *Teaching Sociology* 23:353-363.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette and Sally Raskoff. 1994. "Community Service-Learning: Promises and Problems." *Teaching Sociology* 22:248-254.

Mills, C. Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

O'Flaherty, Kathleen M. 1992. "Introducing Students to the Concept of the Sociological Imagination: A Written Assignment." *Teaching Sociology* 20:326-328.

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EXHIBIT 1

Rust College
Division of Social Sciences
Introduction to Sociology
Soci 230
SYLLABUS
Spring 1997

Dr. Nancy Balazadeh
Office: BCS 107
Phone: 252-8000
ext. 4309
Office hours:
12:00-1:00 p.m.
2:30-3:30 p.m.
& by appointment

COURSE GOALS and OBJECTIVES: to convey an understanding of the sociological perspective and ways to apply this perspective to everyday life. The focus is on the interplay between the individual and the social environment. The following topics are important: social structure, culture, socialization, social inequalities, deviance, social institutions, and social change.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Students are expected to select one of two options no later than the second week. The options are as follows:

OPTION R (regular)		OPTION S (service-learning)	
2 Exams	50 points	2 Exams +	50 points
		2 Take-Home Essays	10 points
5 Assignments	25 points	2 Assignments	10 points
Final	25 points	Service-Learning	30 points
	100 points		100 points

GRADING SCALE: A total of 100 points can be earned in this class. Grading is as follows:

A (90%) 90 & above
B (80%) 80-89
C (70%) 70-79
D (60%) 60-69
F (59%) 59-& below

TEXT: William C. NesSmith, THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY (1995).

EXHIBIT 2

SECOND OPTION: Sociology of _____

AGENCY PLACEMENT: _____

Student Volunteers are required to:

1. Attend the initial orientation/training session.
2. Complete an application form and return to the Service-Learning Office - Room 108 of the McMillan Multi-Purpose Building.
3. Submit one letter of recommendation from a professor.
4. Complete a confidentiality, ethical issues, liability and insurance contract.
5. Sign a contract of service agreeing to 20 hours of service at an area agency.
6. Keep a journal of activities carried out "in service."
7. Complete the assigned related readings.
8. Write a reflective paper on the service experience.
9. Make a class-room presentation of the service experience.

GRADING OF THE SERVICE-LEARNING REQUIREMENT

30 points are earned in the following way:

--18 on-site participation (60% of grade)
-- 6 final, reflective paper (20% of grade)
-- 1.5 daily journal of the experience (5% of grade)
-- 3 classroom presentation (10% of grade)
-- 1.5 required reading (5% of grade)
30 points

Community agencies will be required to give the student, upon completion of the service:

--a letter of recommendation to strengthen the student's resume
--a recommendation (where appropriate) for a Service Excellence Award

PLACEMENT

Students will be placed at the agency site each Wednesday (flex-day). They are required to do at least 2-hours of service on each occasion. The paper and presentation will be due at the end of the module.

EXHIBIT 3

JOURNAL ENTRY

PLACE:	DATE:	TIME:

YOUR TITLE? _____

YOUR DUTIES? _____

_____

_____

DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCES:

ACTIVITIES: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

IDENTIFY A CHALLENGE: _____

_____

_____

_____

IDENTIFY A SUCCESS: _____

_____

_____

_____

EXHIBIT 4

Service Learning Experience

Reflection Paper Outline

Use the following outline to write your reflective paper. Learning theorists point to the conclusion that practical experience followed by reflection are necessary components in a complete cycle of learning.

Service Organization or Program

Write a brief sketch of the organization's or program's local history. Identify its goals and mission (the impact it intends to have on campus life and/or on the larger community). Comment on your perception of its strengths and weaknesses at the onset of your experience.

Describe the organization's or program's structure and your volunteer role's relationship to other roles in the organization or program. Describe how this organization or program deals with the issues of need and services provided. Describe the service work that you observed.

Learning Objectives

Describe the challenges, successes, and setbacks in your efforts to accomplish each of your initial objectives. Be specific. Identify the specific outcomes for each objective, including any mid-course changes that were necessary in clarifying the objectives. Identify the extent of developmental progress.

Personal Development

Describe the skills you acquired or polished during this experience (people skills and organizational skills). Describe the specific contributions you made (the way the role was different because you were in that role). Identify the extent of your personal growth as a volunteer and as a leader.

Identify your reasons for wanting to have this volunteer role in the organization as well as previous experiences that prepared you for this role. Identify relevant readings, seminars, or course work which provided you an understanding of your role as a volunteer for the organization or program you served.

Describe your personal philosophy of service (how an effective volunteer works) including any changes that this experience brought to your vision of how service providers and organizations or programs relate to each other. Describe specifically your volunteer skills and the variety of skills that an organization or program needs to be effective.

Evaluation

End your reflection paper with an overall summary of your experience.

EXHIBIT 5

SERVICE-LEARNING PRESENTATIONS: Participants and Audience

Evaluation Guidelines for **Participants**:

Students should examine the reflective paper outline to prepare for the discussion session on Wednesday. Consider the following questions:

1. In general, what services does Heritage Manor offer the community? What service needs are provided for the residents? What about their families?

2. What did you expect to learn about nursing home care and old age BEFORE you became a volunteer? How do you feel about these early expectations now?

3. What were some of your duties as a volunteer at Heritage Manor? How do you feel your presence effected the residents?

4. To what extent has participation in volunteer work enhanced your personal growth and development?

5. What is your personal philosophy of service?

Evaluation Guidelines for **All Others**:

Students who are actively listening to the classroom discussion, must demonstrate they are actively learning. The instructor is evaluating your active learning in several ways:

1. Students prepare for the discussion by bringing rough notes to class for questions, and they ask questions.

2. Student write a short summary of volunteer discussions. Students conclude their paper by noting their overall impression of the session, and community needs for volunteer services.

5 OR MORE POINTS ARE ASSIGNED FOR ACTIVE LEARNING!

EXHIBIT 6

NAME: _____

ID: _____

GRADING OF THE SERVICE-LEARNING REQUIREMENT

30 points are earned in the following way:

--18 on-site participation (60% of grade)
-- 6 final, reflective paper (20% of grade)
-- 1.5 daily journal of the experience (5% of grade)
-- 3 classroom presentation (10% of grade)
-- 1.5 required reading (5% of grade)
30 points

1. ON-SITE PARTICIPATION: _____

2. REFLECTIVE PAPER: _____

3. DAILY JOURNAL: _____

4. CLASSROOM PRESENTATION: _____

5. REQUIRED READING: _____

TOTAL: _____

RUST COLLEGE AND THE

HOLLY SPRINGS COMMUNITY

THANK YOU!